

# 117219 Capt EM Stevens HAC. 17/8/1919 - 5/9/1944



# Edwin's war 1938 - 1944

**A snapshot of Edwin's war, taken from his many letters home.**

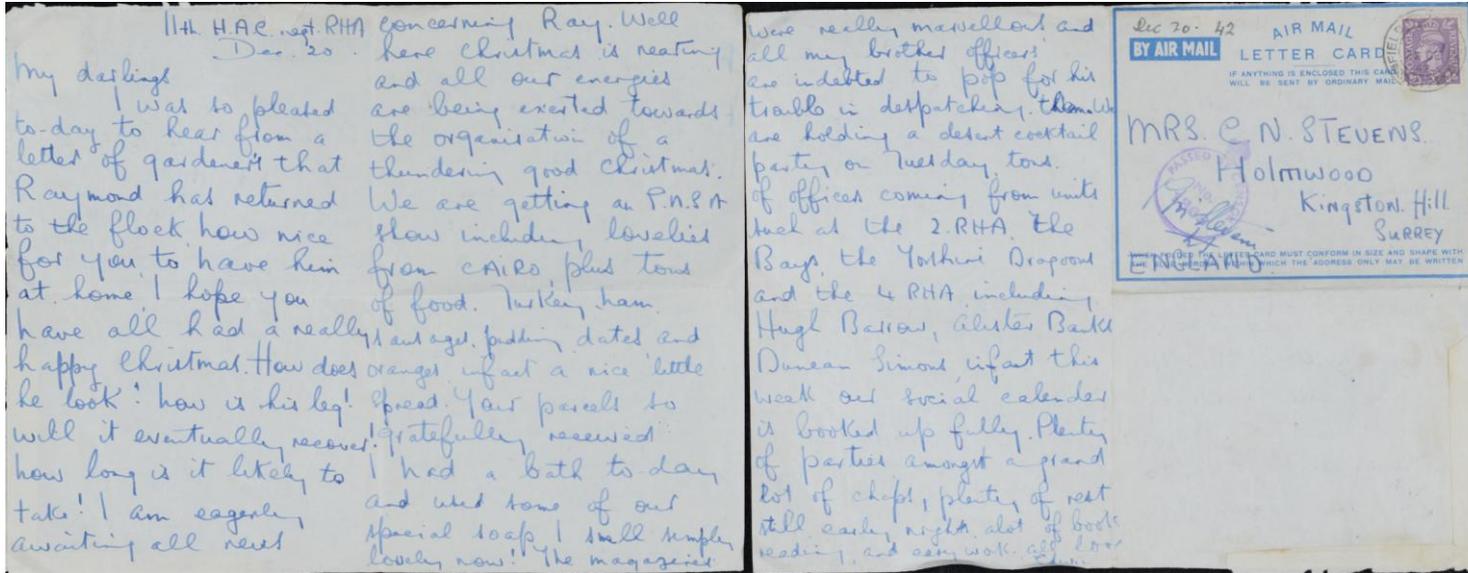
- 1939/05/15 Volunteered for Officer Training at the HAC, Finsbury Park, after work at Moyses Stevens.
- 1939/09 Attended 121 Officer Training Course in Aldershot. Passing out as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt.
- 1940/01 Joined D Battery, 11th (HAC) Regiment RHA.
- 1940 Most of the year spent in training at multiple UK camps.
- 1942-43 North African campaign in the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division of the Eighth Army. [The Desert Rats]
- 1942/07/15 Departed by troopship [SS Oronsay](#) in a convoy from Liverpool to Capetown & Durban.
- 1942/09/05 Arrived Egypt. He wrote ten letters home explaining his conditions & troop training duties, including live firing, fitness & entertainment – [HERE](#):
- 1942/09 Posted to A Bty 11<sup>th</sup> RHA (HAC) MEF in Cairo for training, then fighting westwards towards Tunis.
- 1942/11/09 During the 2<sup>nd</sup> battle of El Alamein, his personal 'George Truck' was hit by a 105mm shell. The men sitting on each side of him were killed. Shocked & briefly knocked out, he continued in command.
- 1942/12/20 Met Duncan Simonds (his future brother-in-law and my father) amongst 4<sup>th</sup> RHA officers, at a Christmas function. The letters are [- HERE](#)
- 1943/01 Flew by Hudson with Gen Galloway from Martuba in Libya to Cairo on the BDRA OP. A course at the Base Depot, Royal Artillery for Forward Observation Officers. Then some leave.
- 1943/01 Hospitalised with dysentery.
- 1943/05 Appointed Technical Adjutant, Regimental HQ 11<sup>th</sup> RHA (HAC) in Constantine, Algeria.  
Responsible for re-quipping his regiment and waterproofing all their vehicles for the landings in Sicily.
- 1943/07 Being Adjutant, Edwin was not in the 1<sup>st</sup> wave of the invasion of Sicily. His story is [- HERE](#):

# Edwin's war 1938 - 1944

- 1943/08/09 Hospitalised in Syracuse with malaria & rejoined his exhausted regiment on 08/21, when they moved to the coast near Catania for rest after their Sicilian campaign victory.
- 1943-09/15 Appointed Troop Cmdr. A Battery 11 HAC who were then shipped from Syracuse to Tunis for rest.
- 1943/10/03 To hospital in Bizerte with jaundice, then flown to Algiers to Cairo & Alexandria for leave till 30/11.
- 1944/02/24 Appointed ADC to Gen. Galloway. HQ 1<sup>st</sup> British Armoured Division, in Sidi Moussa, Algiers.
- 1944/03/07 Flew from Algiers to Naples with Gen Galloway for 4 weeks. Where Gen Galloway was tasked to lead the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Div attack on Monte Cassino for the Third Battle of Cassino, March 15-25. From his billet in a ruined mansion, he could watch the assault. Letters from this period are [- HERE:](#)
- 1944/03/18 Wrote he had witnessed 500 allied bombers dropping heavy bombs on Monte Cassino on 15<sup>th</sup> March.
- 1944/05/05 Flew to Cairo in an '[Avro York](#)' for training in aerial photography for Forward Observation Officers, then leave. He sent home loads of images [- HERE](#)
- 1944/05 The hand-coloured photo that illustrates the front page of this story was sent home from Cairo.
- 1944/06/10 Started on the Commander RA's Staff as Chief Liaison Officer, later Intelligence Officer.
- 1944/07/10 He was flown in secret from Algiers via; Cairo, Tobruk & Malta to Naples. To manage the loading of Allied invasion forces onto ships, to invade southern France in Operation Dragoon on August 15<sup>th</sup>.
- 1944/08/04 Gen Galloway was flown home ill & left the Division.
- 1944/08/14 He rejoined 1<sup>st</sup> British Armoured Division HQ RA, now moving north towards Rimini in Italy.
- 1944/09/05 During the attack on the San Savino-Passano ridge (part of The Gothic Line, the last major German defensive line) he was fatally wounded near Cevolabbate, close to the junction of via Garibaldi and via Vicinale Ca' Ronchi. He died later that day.
- From joining up in 1939, Edwin wrote about 500 letters home. His last letters are [- HERE.](#)

# Edwin's war 1938 - 1944

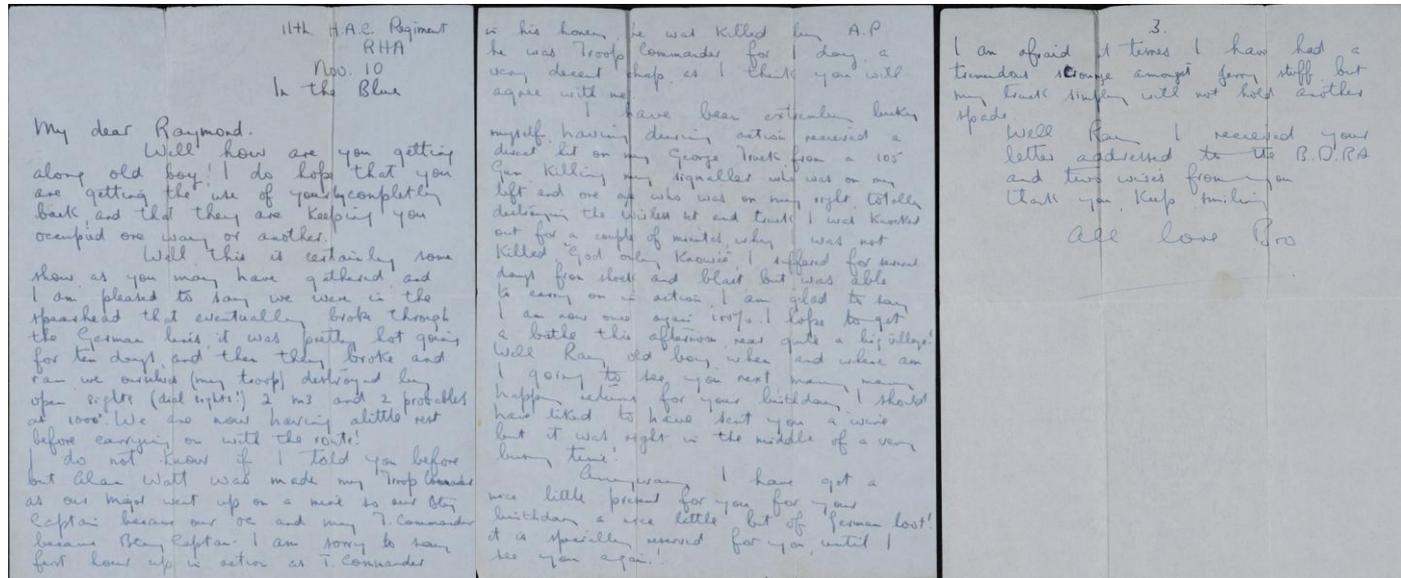
Here are two letters home from the Egyptian desert in late 1942 after the Second Battle of El Alamein, that demonstrate the extremes of his wartime life:



November 10<sup>th</sup>.  
To his brother Raymond following the Second battle of El Alamein, Egypt. When he survived a direct hit on his truck from a 105mm gun that killed those sitting on each side of him.

December 20<sup>th</sup>.  
To his parents, on meeting his future brother-in-law, Capt Duncan Simonds, 4<sup>th</sup> RHA, at a Christmas function in the desert.

[\[letters here\]](#)



## Capt EM Stevens HAC. Sept 4-5 1944

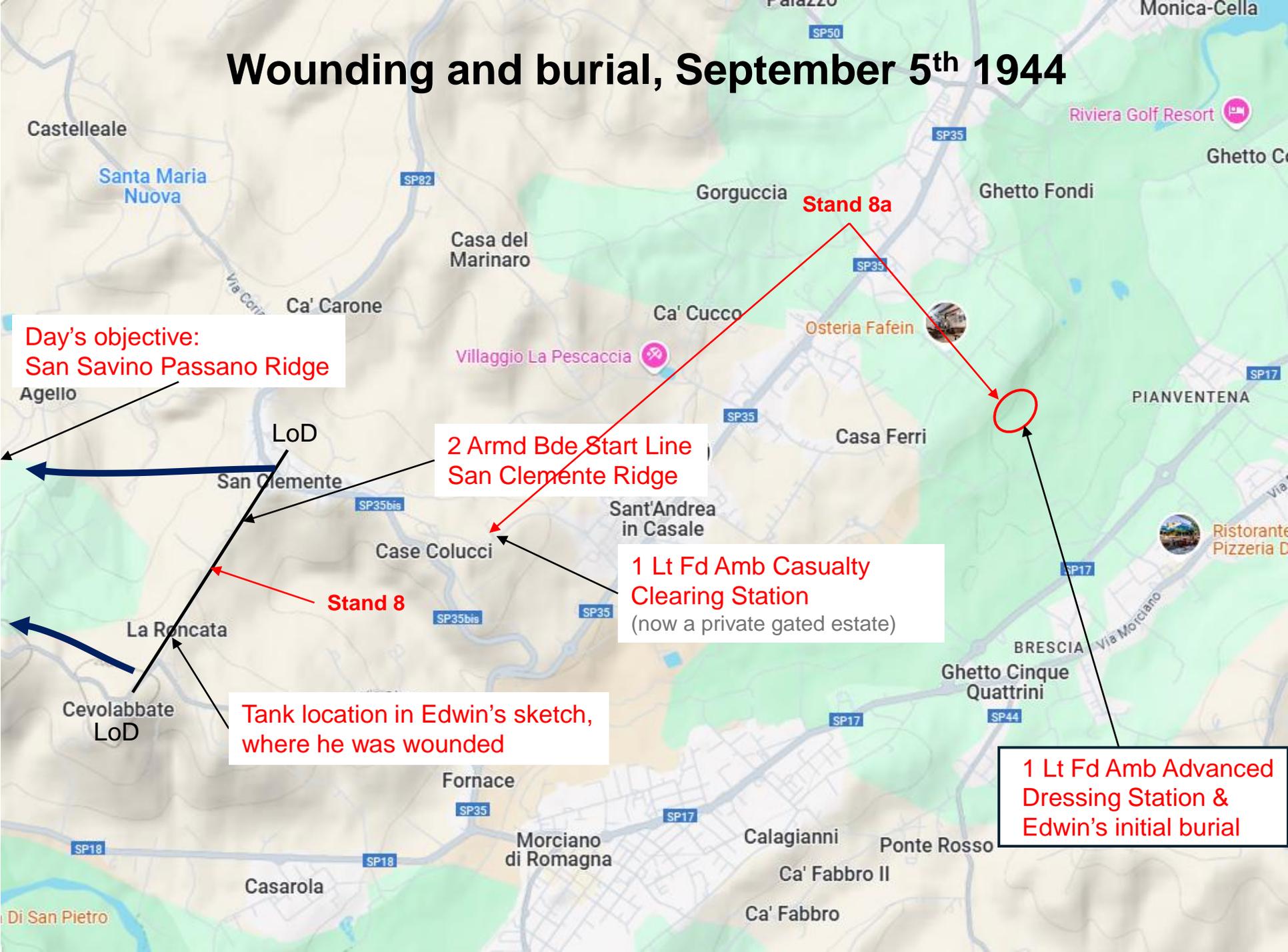
4 Indian Division and 46 Infantry Division were leading the V (BR) Corps assault on the Gothic Line in late Aug-early Sep 44. Both Divisions were tasked with breaking into the German defensive line and opening a 'hole' for 1 Armoured Division to pass through and then exploit the much easier terrain beyond for tanks, all the way to the River Po.

46 Infantry Division believed that they had created such a hole in the German line on 4 September 1944 and so V (BR) Corps ordered 1 Armoured Division to advance from their reserve position 100 miles overnight on 4-5 September 1944, itself an enormous undertaking across mountainous terrain, and attack next morning. The 'hole' was believed to be beyond the San Savino-Passano Ridge, so this ridge was established as the Line of Departure (LoD) for the 5 Sep 44 attack by 2 Armoured Brigade.

It turned out that no such 'hole' had been created, so that when 2 Armoured Brigade arrived at San Clemente, still on their way to the LoD on the San Savino-Passano Ridge, they discovered that the Germans still held that ridge and that they were in full view of the massed German anti-tank guns. As 2 Armoured Brigade advanced as ordered, they were systematically destroyed by the German anti-tank guns and forced to retreat with heavy losses of life and equipment.

Edwin was near Cevolabbate, close to the junction of via Garibaldi & via Vicinale Ca' Ronchi, briefing Brigadier EPN Jones Commander Royal Artillery HQ 1 Armoured Division on the day's plan, when they were spotted & he was fatally wounded by German artillery fire.

# Wounding and burial, September 5<sup>th</sup> 1944



Day's objective:  
San Savino Passano Ridge

2 Armd Bde Start Line  
San Clemente Ridge

1 Lt Fd Amb Casualty  
Clearing Station  
(now a private gated estate)

Tank location in Edwin's sketch,  
where he was wounded

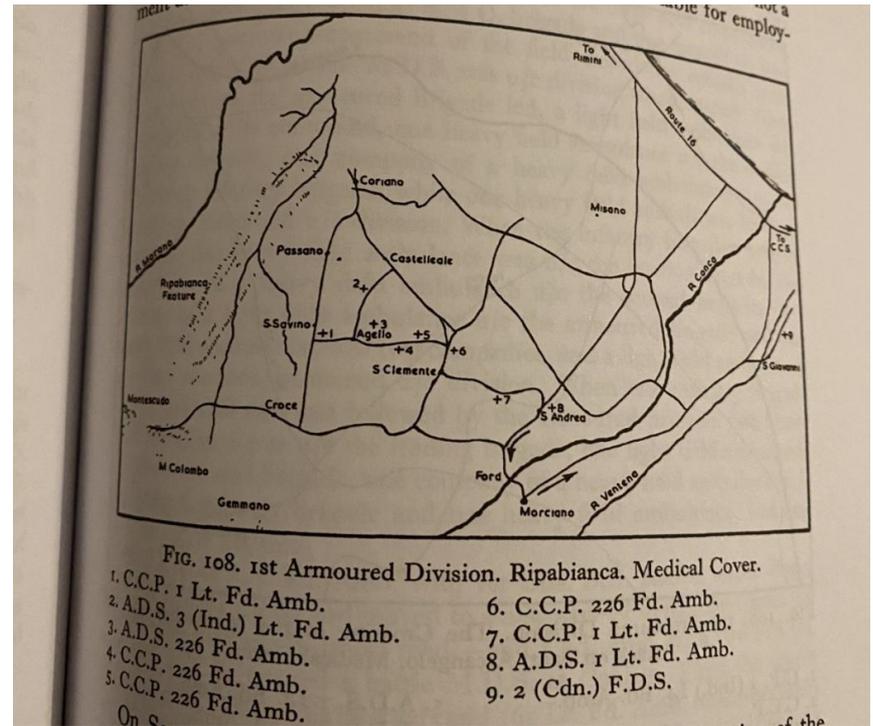
1 Lt Fd Amb Advanced  
Dressing Station &  
Edwin's initial burial



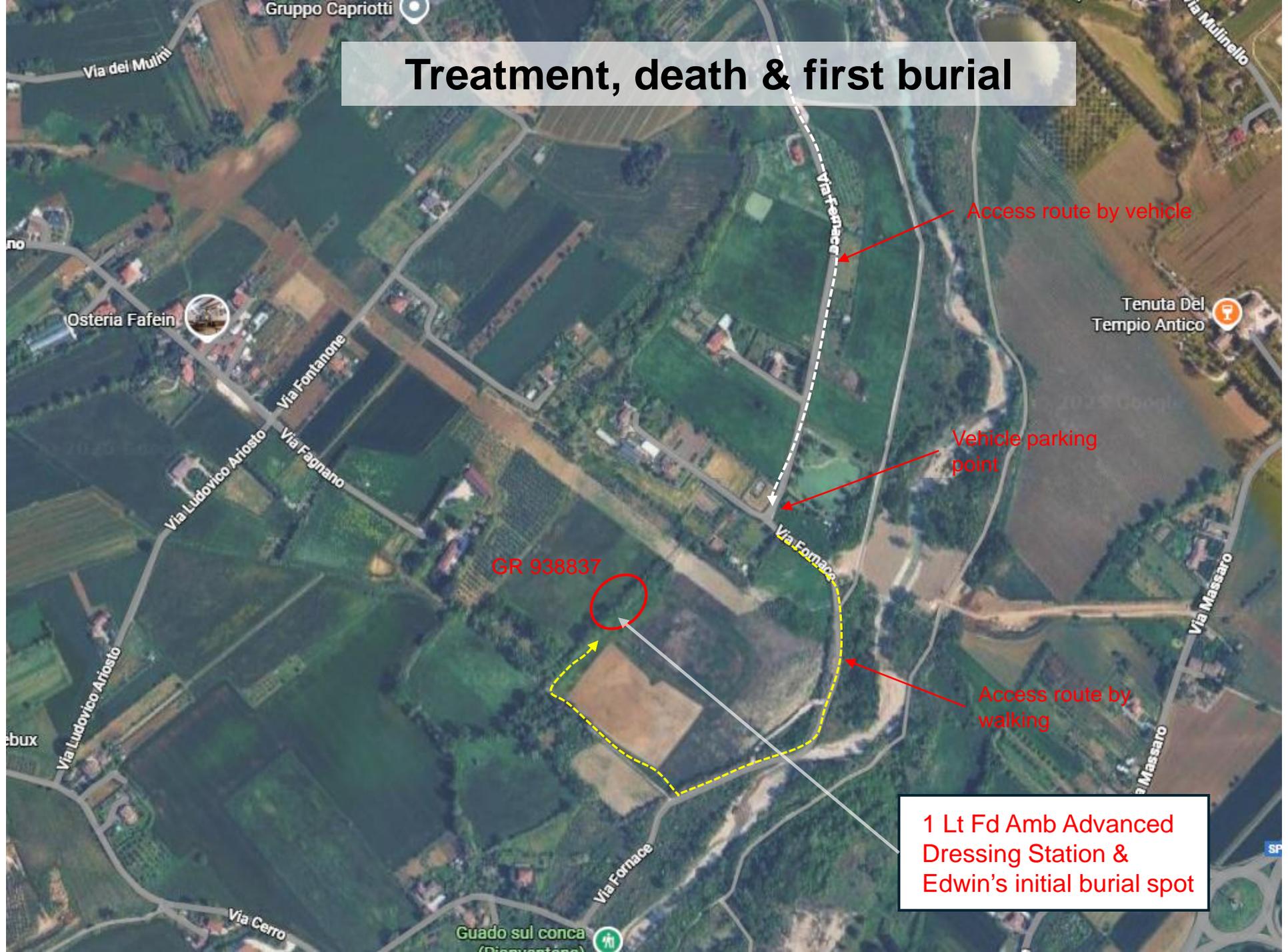


1 Lt Fd Amb Advanced Dressing Station that day was located at Grid Reference 938837. Here he died & was immediately buried outside, with about 25 of his R.A. colleagues, in Row A Grave 5.

**'In some corner of a foreign field'**



# Treatment, death & first burial



Access route by vehicle

Vehicle parking point

Access route by walking

GR 938837

1 Lt Fd Amb Advanced Dressing Station & Edwin's initial burial spot

Via dei Mulini

Via Mulinello

Tenuta Del Tempio Antico

Osteria Fafein

Via Fontanone  
Via Fagnano  
Via Ludovico Ariosto

Via Fornace

Via Fornace

Via Massaro

Via Massaro

Via Fornace

Via Cerro

Guado sul conca (Dianziano)

# Gradara Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, Rimini.

Edwin was reburied in Gradara Military Cemetery in grave 1 B 30, on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1945 by 19 Graves Registration unit.

Initially with a plain white wooden cross.



This was replaced in time for his parents to visit in January 1950 by the standard CWGC sandstone headstone design, with his parent's own inscription at the bottom.



# Gradara Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery

**GRAVES CONCENTRATION REPORT FORM** CMF Form 7

Report No. I9GR/OC/OI48 Sheet 1 of 3 Schedule No.

Place of Burial British Empire Cemetery-Gradara Map Reference Sheet IO9 - 024843

The following are buried here

REGIMENT	ARMY NO.	NAME AND INITIALS	RANK	DATE OF DEATH	PREVIOUSLY BURIED AT	TYPE OF GRAVE	DATE OF RE-BURIAL	PLOT	ROW	GRAVE
9.L. <i>RAC</i>	407278	HAYDEN J.A.	1 <i>Lieut</i>	5.9.44	ICGR/	Cross & Disc	25.5.45	I	B	11 ✓
9.L. "	7945648	PINN D.	2 <i>TPR</i>	"	MJG/	Cross	"	I	B	20 ✓
10.H. "	7901167	GOODALL H.S. ✓	3 <i>SGT</i>	4.9.44	2476	Cross & Disc	"	I	B	21 ✓
BAYS "	7953796	PEACOCK J.S.	4 <i>TPR</i>	5.9.44	Sh. IO9	Cross	"	I	B	25 ✓
<i>RA (HQ) (A&amp;M) DIV (CAN)</i>	117219	STEVENS E.M.	5 <i>CAPT</i>	" " "	938837	"	"	I	B	30 ✓
<i>9 L. (RAC) (7th FB DELT SQN)</i>	5890416	COWIE L.J.	6 <i>CPL</i>	" " "	"	"	"	I	B	12 ✓
<i>7th RAC</i>	288825	BUTCHER J.W.D.	7 <i>LIEUT</i>	" " "	"	Cross & Disc	"	I	B	26 ✓
<i>FORRESTERS</i>	486369I	READ S.	8 <i>CPL</i>	5.9.44	"	"	"	I	B	36 ✓
10.H. <i>RAC</i>	237383	THOROLD A.W.	9 <i>LIEUT</i>	" " "	"	Cross	"	I	B	22 ✓
10.H. "	7903637	BROWN F.A.	10 <i>SGT</i>	" " "	"	"	"	I	B	23 ✓
10.H. "	203626	KERFOOT-ROBERTS S.	<i>LIEUT</i>	7.9.44	"	"	"	I	B	24 ✓

I WAS PRESENT THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS OF EXHUMATION AND HAVE OBSERVED THE ORDER CONTAINED IN LETTER No. I9GR DATED 2 OCT. 43. RECOVERIES WERE MADE IN ACCORDANCE WITH ATTACHED LIST.

O.C. *[Signature]* Lieut.

19 Graves Registration Unit.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission was founded by Fabian Ware who was horrified by the way bodies were disposed of during the early part of WW1. Under his leadership, all bodies found were eventually collected from their temporary graves and moved to special cemeteries. He believed that all our war cemeteries should have consistent features that distinguished them from their civilian counterparts. So, they all have a sandstone headstone in similar style that allows for the different religions and a 'Cross of Sacrifice' near the entrance. They are maintained to a high standard by all the countries who fought & died in that war.

# The Stevens Archives at The Commonwealth War Graves Commission

When he left the UK in 1941 never to return, Edwin became a prolific writer, sometimes daily, to his family. Over 1000 pages of his letters, aerogrammes & telegrams survive, in both hardcopy & digital format.

His letters, pictures and some wartime souvenirs, some letters of condolence received by his family, together with some of the personal effects recovered from his body, are all now preserved in the archives of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in Marlow. Where they are available to study.

The same applies to his elder brother 117204 Capt. Raymond Stevens HAC RA. They volunteered to join the HAC in Finsbury Park, London on the same day, the 15<sup>th</sup> May 1939.

Raymond was killed 19 days after his younger brother, at Oosterbeek near Arnhem, on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1944.

So their poor parents lost their two sons in 1944, just 19 days apart,.

Compiled in 2025 by their nephew Raymond Simonds.

**‘LEST WE FORGET’**